

Questions and Answers on the Impacts of a Government Shutdown

Will I continue to receive my Social Security and SSI checks?

During a government shutdown, recipients will continue to receive their Social Security and SSI checks. However, a shutdown suspends the issuance of Social Security cards. On a typical day, approximately 60,000 Americans apply for Social Security cards, which they may need to be able to start a job, take out a loan, open a bank account, or conduct other financial transactions. During a shutdown, no Social Security cards are issued.

Will my mail still arrive?

Yes. The approximately 500,000 Postal Service employees are exempt from furlough because the Postal Service is self-funded.

Will I still be able to visit the national parks and monuments?

During the 2013 16-day shutdown, national parks, national monuments, and the Smithsonian museums were closed. However, the Trump Administration has announced that it will work to keep national parks “as accessible as possible” in the event of a shutdown. Officials have said that the anticipated plan is to keep many national parks open for hiking, wildlife watching, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. Open-air parks and monuments in Washington, D.C. will remain open. However, other services that require National Park Service staff, including campgrounds and concessions, will be closed.

How will the shutdown affect FEMA natural disaster clean-up efforts?

It’s unclear how ongoing FEMA recovery efforts in Texas, Florida, California, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands from recent hurricanes and wildfires will be impacted. FEMA staff would still respond to emergencies, but the Trump Administration has not clarified how many workers, if any, would continue with long-term projects.

What is the impact on veterans’ services?

During a government shutdown, all VA medical facilities and clinics will remain fully operational. However, VA call centers and hotlines cease to function, and Veterans Benefits Administration public contact services are not available. In addition, the 2013 16-day shutdown stopped progress in reducing veterans’ disability claims backlog, which had previously been progressing at a rate of almost 20,000 claims per week. In addition, during the 2013 16-day shutdown, many veterans lost access to vocational rehabilitation and education counseling services.

What is the impact on U.S. military personnel?

The Defense Department issued guidance today saying that in the event of a shutdown, “Military personnel on active duty, including reserve component personnel on federal active duty, will continue to report for duty and carry out assigned duties.” Regarding their pay, the Washington Post reports, “There would be no gap in their pay unless the shutdown lasted past February 1, and otherwise they would continue on the job without getting paid until the shutdown ended or until Congress and the President agreed to cover their costs before it ended. The last time the government shut down, in 2013, the military remained on the job and legislation to pay service members during the shutdown was signed by President Obama.”

What is the impact on small businesses?

A shutdown halts federal loans to small businesses. During a shutdown, the Small Business Administration stops approving applications for small businesses to obtain loans and loan guarantees, typically \$1 billion per month. During the 2013 16-day shutdown, the SBA was unable to process about

700 applications for \$140 million in small business loans.

What is the impact on federal housing loans?

During a shutdown, the Federal Housing Administration stops approving applications for housing loans. During the 2013 16-day shutdown, the FHA delayed processing over 500 applications for loans to develop, rehabilitate, or refinance around 80,000 units of multifamily rental housing.

What is the impact on medical research?

During a shutdown, NIH shuts down most medical research taking place on its campus in Maryland, prevents the enrollment of patients in NIH Clinical Center studies, and stops reviewing medical research grant applications and making or renewing research grants.

What is the impact on the Centers for Disease Control?

During a shutdown, CDC has to greatly curtail its activities to conduct flu season surveillance and monitoring, promote immunization, support state and local health departments, and update disease treatment and prevention recommendations.

What is the impact on food safety activities?

During a shutdown, the FDA is unable to support the majority of its food safety activities. The 2013 16-day shutdown sharply curtailed critical FDA food safety inspections of domestic and international food facilities.

Which federal employees keep working during a government shutdown?

When there is a government shutdown, federal agencies are required to classify their employees as either “essential” or “non-essential.” The employees classified as “essential” continue to work during the shutdown. However, the employees classified as “non-essential” are put on unpaid furlough. In the 2013 16-day shutdown, about 800,000 of the 2.1 million civilian federal employees in the executive branch were classified as “non-essential” and furloughed.

Do furloughed federal employees get back pay?

That is up to the Congress and White House. The precedent has been that furloughed employees are later paid, through enactment of legislation. For example, that was done in the most recent shutdown in 2013.